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ENG 3009G-011: Myth and Culture

Bonnie Irwin
Eastern Illinois University

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English 3009G, Section 011 (Summer 2003)

Myth and Culture

Dr. Bonnie Irwin
 Office: 3871 Coleman
 Office Phone: 581-6304 (e-mail: cfbdi@eiu.edu)
 Office Hours: M,Tu 12:30-1:30 PM; W, Th, F 9:30-10:30AM

M-F 10:30 AM - 12:30 PM
 Coleman 3150

Course Description

The catalog describes this course as follows: Through comparative analysis of myths from selected cultural traditions, the course will examine relationships among mythical, historical, anthropological and scientific ways of understanding. You will find, however, as you talk to your peers, that each instructor teaches this course a bit differently, with different texts and emphases. So... what sets *this* section apart?

In terms of format, I like to see a lively class. I will do whatever I can to keep you awake and involved and interested. Don't be surprised to see a lot of small group interaction and a variety of activities. *I do not* want to hear myself talk 10 hours a week and I doubt you do either.

There may be times when the subject matter for the course will be based on your outside research. We will not limit ourselves to the texts, and we will not always all be reading the same thing.

Course Objectives

By the end of the semester, I expect you to *know*...

- what myths are and how they function
- the role of myth in shaping community and individual identity
- what some of the beliefs and customs of ancient peoples, especially the Tibetans, Navajos, and Mayans are
- what some of the myths of the Tibetan Buddhists, Navajos, and Mayans are
- the significance of similarities and differences among cultural myths and beliefs
- that all people have myths, whether they know it or not

With this knowledge, I expect you to be able to...

- break down cultural misunderstandings and barriers
- recognize your own prejudices
- recognize similarities among cultures
- be able to read a myth from any culture and draw some tentative conclusions about that culture
- recognize and be able to analyze your own culture and mythology
- learn different ways of teaching about cultures and texts
- enjoy

Texts

Kane, *Wisdom of the Mythtellers*
 Dundes, *Sacred Narrative*
 Lhalungpa, *Life of Milarepa*
 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*
 Zolbrod, *Diné Bahane'*
 Tapahonso, *Saanii Dahataal*

There is a *lot* of reading in this course, some selections easier than others. Thus, discipline will be rewarded, procrastination will get you into trouble. You will enjoy most of the selections, I hope; the issues they deal with are relevant in our culture today, even if the names appear strange.

E-reserve Readings (Password: b3009)

Goldstein, "Dalai Lama's Dilemma"
 Walker, "Essential Commitment"
 Lewis, "Living by Wonder"
 Roberts & Shilstone, "Long Walk to Bosque Redondo"
 Geyang, "Old Nun Tells Her Story"
 Sanders, "Telling the Holy"
 Nattier, "Why Buddhism, Why Now?"
 Morrissey, "Your Cell Will Teach You Everything"

Films

Popol Vuh
Dalai Lama: Soul of Tibet
Tibet: the End of Time
Rocks with Wings
Clash of the Titans
Miracle on 34th Street

Movies do not mean a day off. Be an active viewer: *think* about what you see and hear.

Grade Breakdown:

Participation and Quizzes	200 points
Paper 1 (places)	100 points
Paper 2 (teachers)	100 points
Paper 3 (myth)	150 points
Exam 1 (Navajo)	100 points
Exam 2 (Tibet)	100 points
Exam 3 (Rome)	100 points
Final	150 points
Total	1000 points

Course Grade

901-1000 points	A
801-900 points	B
701-800 points	C
601-700 points	D
0-600 points	F

Words of Advice on Grades

Adequate, Average work will earn you a 'C' in this course. If you merely go through the motions, but do so with a certain amount of skill, you are an average (i.e. 'C') student. If you merely go through the motions without much skill, you may very well earn a 'D'; missing deadlines consistently or racking up lots of absences may also lead to a 'D'. Good work, i.e. extra effort and good quality product will earn you a 'B.' Excellent work, i.e. going above and beyond the requirements for assignments, using both skill and creativity, should earn you an 'A.' Keep in mind that doing an assignment is no guarantee of an 'A' or 'B'—you must also do it well. If you are shooting for a particular grade in this course, I advise that you come see me *early* so we can discuss how you might best achieve that grade. I *do not* care what grade you *need*; I will do whatever I can to help you *earn* the grade you *want*.

Students with Disabilities

If you have a documented disability and wish to discuss academic accommodations, please contact the Office of disability Services at 581-6583 (9th St. Hall).

Electronic Writing Portfolio

If you need a paper from this class for your Electronic Writing Portfolio, please inform me at the beginning of the semester and see me for guidelines.

English Department Policy on Plagiarism

Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—"the appropriation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's original work" (Random House Dictionary of the English Language)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.

Attendance

I take attendance each class period, but there are no points assigned to attendance itself. Instead, you are allowed two absences with no questions asked. Considering that is nearly the equivalent of 2 weeks during a normal semester, I think the policy is quite generous. After that, each absence will mean a deduction in 30 points in your course grade. For example, missing a total of 5 classes (1 week or over 25% of the classes!) will result in your course grade being reduced by a full grade. Of course, extended illnesses and emergencies will be accommodated, but I also expect you to use your absences wisely. Don't skip class at the beginning of the semester and then expect me to be sympathetic later on if you get sick. You are responsible for taking care of your own absences: getting the notes from a classmate, getting any handouts and assignments from me. It is obviously in your best interest to attend class every time because you will *always* miss something if you do not. For some of the participation points you will miss by missing class, I will allow you to attend appropriate campus events and report on them.

Late Work

Because our syllabus is so compressed, late work will only be accepted in the case of an excused absence. The same applies to missing an exam. Only in cases of extreme emergency or serious illness will make up exams be offered.

Cheerleading

All of the above sounds rather intimidating, but if you get into the spirit and work ethic of this class, we *will* have fun! You will find the class intense at times, but remember we're only here for 4 weeks, so we need to make the best of it!

Assignment Summary (More detailed assignment sheets forthcoming)

1. Papers

Because the quizzes, exams, and class discussions will cover the reading in some detail, we are going to use the papers to reflect on these same themes on a more personal level. In other words, what relevance does all this have on *your* life? You will have the option of revising one of the first two papers for a higher grade, if you wish.

a. Place Essay

Most myths are centered around a particular place, often a scared space. This essay will reflect the role of place and home in your life.

b. Teacher Essay

Much of *The Life of Milarepa* turns on the protagonist's relationship with his teacher or spiritual guide. In this essay, you will reflect upon the important teachers in your own life. These may include, but are not limited to, school teachers.

c. Myth Essay

What does myth mean to you? Using quotations from the syllabus as a point of departure, you will reflect on the myths and beliefs of your own life.

2. Exams

Exams will be a combination of matching, short answer, and essay. The final will contain comprehensive essay questions and will be take home. Essays are open-book, open-note, and you will usually be furnished with topics in advance. Thus, if you are doing the reading, paying attention in class, and *thinking* about what we're studying, you should do well.

3. Quizzes

There will be frequent quizzes on the reading. These are primarily to keep you accountable. If you do the reading, you will do all right on the quizzes. Expect at least one a week.

4. Participation

A passing grade in participation means showing up and being prepared for class. Higher grades are based on your level of engagement in discussion, group work, and presentations. Much of the class work in this course will be done in groups. We will try to maintain the same groups all semester, and part of your grade will be based on how well you contribute to your group's work.

Questions??

If I've forgotten something or you have questions at any time,
please feel free to drop by my office (3871 Coleman)

SYLLABUS

Unit 1: Tibetan Buddhism and *The Life of Milarepa*

M	Jun 16	Introduction to Myth Forms of Oral Narrative; What is Myth? Introduction to Buddhism Introduction to Tibetan Culture Film: <i>Tibet, The End of Time</i>
Tu	Jun 17	"Living by Wonder." (e-reserve) <i>Life of Milarepa</i> , pp. 9-74 "Essential Commitment" (e-reserve)
W	Jun 18	<i>Life of Milarepa</i> , pp. 75-145 (You may skip the poems.) "Your Cell Will Teach You Everything" (e-reserve)
Th	Jun 19	<i>Life of Milarepa</i> , pp. 146-197 (You may skip the poems.) "The Truth of Myth," <i>Sacred Narrative</i> , pp. 98-109
F	Jun 20	Exam 1 "Dalai Lama's Dilemma" (e-reserve) "Old Nun Tells Her Story" (e-reserve) "Why Buddhism, Why Now?" (e-reserve) Film: <i>Dalai Lama: Soul of Tibet</i>

Unit 2: Navajo Myth and Culture

M	Jun 23	<i>Dine Bahane</i> , 35-99 "Telling the Holy." (e-reserve). Paper 1 due
Tu	Jun 24	<i>Dine Bahane</i> , 113-168 "The Creation Myths of the North American Indians," <i>Sacred Narrative</i> , pp. 166-181
W	Jun 25	<i>Dine Bahane</i> , 171-241
Th	Jun 26	<i>Dine Bahane</i> , 241-289 Film: <i>Rocks with Wings</i>
F	Jun 27	Exam 2 "The Long Walk to Bosque Redondo," (e-reserve) <i>Saanii Dahataal</i> , Preface and pp.1-4, 7-10, 19-20, 41-42, 67-68. 85-92 Film: <i>Rocks with Wings</i>

Unit 3: Roman Myth and Culture

M	Jun 30	Introduction to Roman Culture <i>Metamorphoses</i> , Book 1 (all); Book 2, pp. 28-40, 54-56; Book 3, pp. 61-64, 67-73
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"Myth and Story," *Sacred Narrative*, pp. 110-136
Paper 2 due

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|----|-------|---|
| Tu | Jul 1 | <i>Metamorphoses</i> , Book 4, pp. 83-87, 100-106; Book 5, pp. 107-115; Book 6 (all); Book 7, pp. 153-167
Film: <i>Clash of the Titans</i> |
| W | Jul 2 | <i>Metamorphoses</i> , Book 8, pp. 181-190; 200-208; Book 9, pp. 217-218
Film: <i>Clash of the Titans</i> |
| Th | Jul 3 | <i>Metamorphoses</i> , Book 10, pp. 234-237, 239-252; Book 11, pp. 261-266; Book 12, pp. 285-290; Book 15, pp. 367-378, 388-392
Film: <i>Clash of the Titans</i>
Paper 3 due |
| F | Jul 4 | No Class—Independence Day Holiday |

Unit 4: Myth and Us

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|----|--------|---|
| M | Jul 7 | "Flexibility of Myth," <i>Sacred Narrative</i> , pp. 217-224
Exam 3
Optional Paper Revision due
Film: <i>Popol Vuh</i> |
| Tu | Jul 8 | Readings from <i>Wisdom of the Mythtellers</i>
Take-home Final distributed |
| W | Jul 9 | Film: <i>Miracle on 34th Street</i> |
| Th | Jul 10 | Take-home Final Due |

Quotations on Myth

- "Myths are other people's religion." (Sam Keen)
- "The real point of myth is not to give an objective world picture; what is expressed in it, rather, is how we human beings understand ourselves in the world." (Rudolf Bultmann, German theologian)
- "To create a myth, that is to say, to venture behind the reality of the sense to find a superior reality, is the most manifest sign of the greatness of the human soul and the proof of its capacity for infinite growth and development." (Louis-Auguste Sabatier, French Protestant Theologian)
- "Mythology is the womb of mankind's initiation into life and death." (Joseph Campbell, Myth Scholar)
- "Myth explains the why and how of here and now" (Th. P. Van Baaren, Professor of Science and Religion)
- "Myth is a past with a future, exercising itself in the present." (Carlos Fuentes, Mexican author)
- "Myth embodies the nearest approach to absolute truth that can be expressed in words" (Ananda Coomaraswamy, Indian philosopher)
- "Myths describe the various and sometimes dramatic breakthroughs of the sacred (or the supernatural) into the World. Myth is regarded as a sacred story, and hence a 'true story,' because it deals with *realities*. The cosmogonic myth is 'true' because the existence of the World is there to prove it." (Mircea Eliade, Myth scholar)
- "Myth is a symbolic story which demonstrates the inner meaning of the universe and of human life." (Alan Watts, British expositor of Buddhism to the West)
- "Mythology is the study of whatever religious or heroic legends that are so foreign to a student's experience that he cannot believe them to be true." (Robert Graves, British poet and myth scholar)
- "The friend of wisdom is the friend of myth." (Aristotle, Greek philosopher)
- "Myth gives man, very importantly, the illusion that he can understand the universe and that he does understand the universe." (Claude Levi-Strauss, French anthropologist)
- "Myths are the daydreaming of the human race." (Sigmund Freud, Father of Psychoanalysis)
- "These things never happened, yet they always are." (Saloustios, 4th century Greek scholar)
- "There is mythology now as there was in the time of Homer, only we do not perceive it. Mythology, in the highest sense, is the power exercised by language on thought in every possible sphere of mental activity." (F. Max Müller, Linguist and scholar of myth)
- "Myths are the agents of stability, fictions the agents of change." (Frank Kermode, The Sense of an Ending)
- "Myth is neither conscious poetry nor valid science, but the common root and raw material of both." (George Santayana, Philosopher)